UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Official Records

THIRD COMMITTEE
6th meeting
held on
Thursday, 8 October 1992
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 6th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. DEKANY (Hungary)
(Vice-Chairman)

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92-56911 6062S (E)

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.3/47/SR.6
21 October 1992
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 91: ELIMINATION OF RACISM AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION (continued) (A/47/18, 425, 426, 432, 480, 481)

AGENDA ITEM 92: RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION (continued) (A/47/391, 412, 433)

1. Mrs. DES ILES (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the 12 members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) which are members of the United Nations, said that the peoples of the Caribbean Community were a racial, ethnic and religious mix who, in their fight against slavery and colonialism, had fashioned societies based on the principles of democracy, justice, freedom and the dignity of the human person. The CARICOM States had consistently supported international efforts to promote human rights for all, irrespective of race, sex, ethnicity or religion, and were convinced that programmes to combat racism, racial discrimination and apartheid must continue to be accorded the highest priority by the United Nations. The recent upsurge in racial, ethnic and religious conflicts in various parts of the world had reinforced the need for such action. As the Secretary-General had pointed out in his 1992 report on the work of the Organization, that trend had been discernible since 1987, which had marked "the beginning of shockwaves caused by the reawakening of old conflicts and the emergence of a number of new rivalries" (A/47/1, para. 14).

2. At the present unsettling stage in international relations, the States of the Caribbean Community were concerned that discrimination appeared to be finding acceptability in an increasing number of communities. All States Members of the United Nations had a responsibility to ensure that the Organization adopted a more active approach to combating that growing cancer, and States themselves should implement more programmes geared towards preventive action and the strengthening of institutions. One important element in that effort should be the effective implementation by States of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The CARICOM States supported the suggestion by the Secretary-General that a seminar should be convened to assess the experience gained in the implementation of the Convention.

3. Those objectives could be achieved through the effective use of the proposed third decade to combat racism and racial discrimination. The CARICOM States believed that the Economic and Social Council should be entrusted with coordinating activities for the decade. The corresponding programme of action should promote the objectives of preventive diplomacy and peace-building. One activity which the CARICOM States believed should be implemented as a matter of priority was the proposed seminar on the eradication of incitement to racial hatred and discrimination.

(Mrs. Des Iles, Trinidad and Tobago)

4. If peace and prosperity were to be maintained and promoted at the national level, all individuals and sectors of society must believe that they had a stake in the political, economic, social and cultural life of their country. That should also hold true for indigenous peoples and for vulnerable groups such as minorities and immigrants. The CARICOM States also had an interest in the proposed seminar on the enactment of national legislation to combat racism and racial discrimination affecting ethnic groups, migrant workers and refugees. They were of the view that the International Year for the World's Indigenous People should be followed up with further activities during the proposed decade. The draft programme of action should allow subregions and regions to determine, during the course of the proposed decade, the specific themes of seminars or workshops to be organized, bearing in mind developments in the region.

5. The States of the Caribbean Community agreed that the fight against apartheid must continue to be accorded high priority in the draft programme of action for the proposed decade. The Boipatong and Ciskei massacres were part of the continuing saga of violence which resulted in loss of life and political uncertainty. Some still held the view, however, that the emergence of a peaceful, non-racial, democratic and united South Africa was near at hand. The CARICOM States would rejoice when that came about, but believed that, in the interim, sanctions against South Africa, which had played an important role in bringing about positive change in that country, should be maintained. The legacy of apartheid would not be short-lived, and the international community would have to devote continued attention to addressing the economic disparity and privation which would persist even after the attainment of full political participation and citizenship by the majority population.

6. Turning to the right of peoples to self-determination, the States of the Caribbean Community believed firmly that the United Nations must continue to promote the interests of the peoples of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories, including those in the Caribbean region.

7. The General Assembly had determined that the use of mercenaries could and did have an impact on the right of peoples to self-determination. The preliminary report of the Special Rapporteur on the question of the use of mercenaries had alerted Member States to the perils of mercenary activities. It was particularly disturbing that mercenarism, which had been associated over the years with the most serious violations of human rights, was now being increasingly linked with criminal activities, such as terrorism and arms and drug trafficking. Member States should update their domestic legislation to include provisions defining mercenarism as an offence. The United Nations might consider providing them with technical assistance to that end.

8. One important challenge in all corners of the globe was to reconcile the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity with the clamour by racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups for self-determination. In

(Mrs. Des Iles, Trinidad and Tobago)

his report (A/47/277), the Secretary-General had observed that "if every ethnic, religious or linguistic group claimed statehood, there would be no limit to fragmentation, and peace, security and economic well-being for all would become ever more difficult to achieve." If the United Nations was to play an enhanced role as peace-keeper, peacemaker and peace-builder, it must also address that challenge at the intergovernmental and institutional levels.

9. Mr. PARSHIKOV (Russian Federation) said that, coinciding with the end of the Second Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, apartheid, the most inhuman form of racism, was about to be eliminated, although its death throes were unduly protracted. One could not rest assured, however, that apartheid would not re-emerge at some point in a new guise. All such manifestations, the most dangerous of which, aggressive nationalism, was turning into a global threat, must be rejected. In his report entitled "An Agenda for Peace" (A/47/277), the Secretary-General brought out the inevitable linkage between the problems of peace, security, economic prosperity and stability of States and the situation of human rights, in particular the protection of minorities. In that connection, he drew attention to the situation of the Russian-speaking minorities in a number of States, which was far from simple and sometimes even tragic.

10. As a result of the collapse of the former Soviet Union, at least 25 million people of Russian extraction having family ties with Russia were now living in new sovereign States in which they had become minorities. Such minorities, however, even when proportionally much smaller than the indigenous population, amounted to hundreds of thousands of people. The process of national renaissance in the new countries had in some cases given rise to most uncivilized behaviour and to policies for the creation of "ethnically pure" States. Particularly alarming in that respect were the discriminatory practices against the Russian-speaking populations established in Latvia and Estonia, which were excluded from political life by law.

11. Those populations shared a common destiny with the peoples of Estonia and Latvia and had until now lived in an enormous single State without boundaries. They did not understand why they could not be fully-fledged citizens of Estonia or Latvia whilst they could enjoy such a status in neighbouring Lithuania. Many such individuals, despite having supported those countries' struggle for independence, were now considered as "occupiers" and had become subject to persecution and discrimination although they had nothing to do with the crimes of the Stalinist-Communist regime.

12. Contrary to the assertion by the Estonian delegation on 29 September 1992, that country's citizenship law could not be considered liberal if almost half the population was not allowed to take part in the elections of 20 September. Neither was it valid to argue that existing legislation was being applied: the Nazi repression in Europe, the recent practice of apartheid in South Africa and the persecution of dissidents in the former socialist countries all took place in strict accordance with the legislation then in force.

(Mr. Parshikov, Russian Federation)

13. It was the opinion of his delegation, and of many human rights organizations throughout the world, that Estonia's citizenship law and Latvia's corresponding draft law ran contrary to the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as to documents of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). They were also incompatible with the bilateral treaties governing relations between the Russian Federation and those two States, which recognized the right of the respective minorities to retain or to obtain Russian, Estonian or Latvian citizenship on the basis of their own free choice.

14. His delegation trusted that all such problems could be resolved through frank and open negotiations. Russia, Estonia and Latvia had similar national interests, and their relations should be prevented from collapsing as a result of aggressive nationalism. The only way out of the problem was to ensure mutual respect for human rights and cooperation between those States, based on the principles of CSCE and the United Nations.

15. In his report "An agenda for peace", the Secretary-General also expressed the idea - especially topical in connection with the item concerning the right of peoples to self-determination - that "the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of States within the established international system, and the principle of self-determination for peoples, both of great value and importance, must not be permitted to work against each other in the period ahead". One possible way of solving the problem would be to interpret the concept of autonomy in a new way: national-cultural or national-territorial. The principles of territorial integrity of States and self-determination of peoples could coexist peacefully only if they were not applied in an extremist manner. Genuine autonomy would make it possible to safeguard the rights of small nations and national minorities without violating the principle of the territorial integrity of States. It was also possible to seek other solutions for the problem, though always in conjunction with an effort to exclude violence from the list of possible options.

16. Mrs. LIM Lay Hoon (Malaysia) said that the world, after passing through a phase of ideological confrontation, was beginning to give its undivided attention to the basic question of human rights: one of the main obstacles to enjoyment of those rights was the problem of racism and racial discrimination.

17. Ethnic strife had led to the fragmentation, accompanied by violence and bloodshed, of some European countries. As a result of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for which no immediate and lasting solution was yet in sight, a terrifying new term - "ethnic cleansing" - had been coined, reminiscent of what happened during the Second World War. Her country unreservedly condemned that racist concept and supported the efforts of the Security Council and other United Nations agencies to bring relief to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It also believed that stronger measures must be pursued to eliminate the causes of the violence and to bring to justice the perpetrators of the atrocities associated with that concept. It therefore supported the

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establishment of the Security Council Commission of Experts to examine and analyse reports of human rights violations in the former Yugoslavia, as provided for under Security Council resolution 780 (1992), as well as the decision of the Economic and Social Council to endorse the appointment of a special rapporteur with a similar mandate. As for a solution of the problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina, her country believed that the separation of ethnic groups into different "cantons" would be unwise because it could create an unbridgeable gap between the different communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which could result in the break up of that republic.

18. Racism and ethnic differences were the cause of many other acts of violence which had caused needless innocent human suffering. The turmoil in Somalia stemmed, inter alia, from strife between opposing tribes. The thousands of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh were also victims of ethnic pressures and animosities. Recent developments in some parts of Europe and even in the United States indicated that racism and racial discrimination were still widespread in spite of the decades devoted to combating them. The partial success that had been achieved demonstrated the need to continue efforts in a third decade, for which the responsible United Nations agencies might perhaps draw up a more imaginative and effective plan of action, taking into account the possibility of diminishing resources. She urged all countries to address the problem seriously by establishing and implementing national plans of action. They would thus lighten the burden on the United Nations and make it possible to combat racism and racial discrimination more effectively. Such plans should place primary emphasis on educating younger generations as to the evils of racism and on promoting racial integration and racial harmony.

19. More than any other difference, the main factor contributing to the existence of racism was economic inequality. A society could not achieve integration and cohesion unless Governments realized the need to overcome such inequality. In the course of its national consolidation, her country had become one of the few truly multiracial States, whose people treasured the racial compact which had been fostered.

20. Efforts to eliminate the institutionalized system of apartheid in South Africa had come up against some serious problems. The violence at Boipatong derailed the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). Her country fully endorsed the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 772 (1992), authorizing the Secretary-General to deploy United Nations observers in South Africa. In that same context, it urged all parties to the conflict to work together to stop the violence.

21. Malaysia had also followed closely developments relating to the right of self-determination. In Haiti, the legitimate Government was still unable to carry out its functions. On the other hand, developments were proceeding well in Angola, in spite of problems. In Western Sahara, preparations for the proposed referendum had still not been finalized. Malaysia called on all the

(Mrs. Lim Lay Hoon, Malaysia)

parties involved to comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions and cooperate with the United Nations through the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

22. After more than four decades, the Palestinian people were still being denied their basic inalienable right to self-determination and it remained ironic that the regime exercising illegal rights over the Palestinian land was being supported by many countries claiming to be the defenders of human rights. Nevertheless, Malaysia welcomed the signs of progress in the negotiations between the Arabs and Israelis sponsored by the United States Government. The present international atmosphere was conducive to a peaceful settlement of conflicts, and hard-line positions should be reviewed and negotiations conducted based strictly on the relevant resolutions of the Security Council in order to resolve the Palestinian question and indeed the whole problem in the Middle East quickly and amicably.

23. In Cambodia, questions were being raised as to whether the people would be able to determine their future through the election of a democratic Government. Malaysia fully supported the United Nations role in achieving that objective and called on all those concerned not to hamper the work of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in implementing the provisions of the Paris Peace Agreement. The outcome of UNTAC's efforts would determine whether the United Nations would continue to be a viable and indispensable system for the maintenance of international peace and security.

24. Mr. ALDOSARI (Bahrain) said that his country welcomed the activities carried out within the framework of the Second Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination as well as the specific goals of the Special Committee against Apartheid, but considered it necessary to continue those parts of the Programme which had not yet been implemented, for example, those relating to the adoption of legislation against racism by all States and the promotion of adherence to the international instruments on human rights.

25. The fundamental principle enshrined in Bahrain's Constitution was that of justice for all citizens with no discrimination of any kind, as reflected in the enjoyment of freedom, social security and equality of opportunity. In order to honour that principle of Islamic law, i.e. the equality of all human beings, Bahrain had acceded to international instruments such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. It had also supported the proclamation of each of the two Decades to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination as well as the Economic and Social Council's recommendation to the General Assembly that a third decade should be launched in 1993. In connection with that decade, his Government considered that in establishing its goals, it was necessary to take into account the new international order so as to ensure, inter alia, the right of peoples to self-determination.

(Mr. Aldosari, Bahrain)

26. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination had noted in its report that "the year 1991-1992 has seen fearful sequences of killings deriving from discrimination based on race, colour, descent and national and ethnic origin in several regions of the world". A good deal of that violence had been caused by the activities of the Serbian forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their policy of ethnic cleansing, which was being carried out at precisely the time when the international community was seeking to encourage an atmosphere in which peace and security would prevail throughout the world.

27. His Government also called on the Israeli authorities to end the violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Palestinian and other occupied Arab territories, because only by doing so would it be possible to achieve a final solution of the question of Palestine in the peace negotiations on the Middle East.

28. As regarded South Africa, the Secretary-General pointed out in his report (A/47/432) that there had recently been signs of change there, notably the abolition of such legal pillars of apartheid as the Group Areas Acts, the Land Areas Act and the Population Registration Act. None the less, in view of the persistence of certain discriminatory practices on the part of the Pretoria regime it was necessary to take further measures for the establishment of a non-racial, democratic and equalitarian society.

29. Ms. DAMUSIS (Lithuania), speaking on behalf of Estonia and Latvia as well as her own country, said that the peaceful struggle of the Baltic States for independence was proof positive of their commitment to the elimination of racism and racial discrimination and the right of peoples to self-determination. Even though they had been denied the right to self-determination for fifty years and the issue had been largely ignored by the United Nations, it was to be hoped that the world could learn from that experience and change for the better.

30. The spread of national liberation to all parts of the world was perhaps the most important social and political development of the twentieth century, giving many ethnic groups a greater measure of self-determination. But even as the world grew more interdependent, it seemed to be in danger of being fragmented by a countercurrent of narrow-minded nationalism. As xenophobic groups rose up in the name of so-called "ethnic purity", humanity was beginning to see the difference between legitimate, national, ethnic and racial aspirations and divisive, disunifing tendencies. The real challenge was to overcome the legacy of totalitarianism without threatening the development of democratic institutions or the protection of human rights.

31. As former victims of discrimination, the Baltic States reaffirmed their opposition to racism in all its forms and to any policies based on racial superiority or hatred. As communist regimes had fallen in eastern Europe, violent manifestations of ethnic tensions had taken place; that had not been

(Ms. Damusis, Lithuania)

the case in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, where people of diverse ethnic origins lived in peaceful coexistence.

32. During the early years of Soviet occupation, the Baltic peoples, who numbered 6 million among a population of 270 million in the former Soviet empire, had been decimated by deportations to Siberia. The Baltic languages had come close to extinction as a result of aggressive Russification programmes. Strategic Soviet immigration policies had been implemented to colonize their territories with migrant workers. For example, between 1940 and 1990 8 million transient workers had been sent to Estonia, which had an indigenous population of 1 million. The foreign workers had diluted the indigenous populations of the Baltic States, placing them at a disadvantage in their own countries.

33. That had been manifested, inter alia, in discrimination against Baltic nationals with regard to housing, in the overrepresentation of Russian immigrants among industrial managers and workers, particularly in the military industry, in the gradual displacement of Baltic nationals from the banking, communications, merchant marine, railway and civil aviation sectors, in discriminatory hiring practices and discrimination on the basis of language in the public service and in institutions of higher education, where the use of Russian was mandatory. Current efforts by the Baltic States to eliminate former privileges and to repair the damage caused by fifty years of discrimination were creating a mistaken perception among those who had lost their former privileges and were now equal before law that they were being subjected to ethnic discrimination.

34. The 1989 ethnic minorities law of Estonia was being updated, to bring it into line with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In Latvia, laws were being drafted to protect the rights both of Latvians and of minorities and immigrants. In Lithuania, the 1989 law on ethnic minorities guaranteed equal rights to all citizens, regardless of ethnic origin, and prohibited discrimination on the grounds of race, religion or language.

35. The Baltic States were at a critical stage in their history. It would be naive to suppose that democratization alone would resolve all their problems, especially since the difficult conditions in their countries, caused by problems of unemployment, inflation and indebtedness, were being exacerbated by the presence of foreign troops and weapons on their sovereign territory. Their historical experience made them wary of those who had previously applied discriminatory policies but now proclaimed themselves to be protectors of minorities, even threatening armed intervention.

36. The Baltic States welcomed the work undertaken by the United Nations to combat racism and recognized the need for the adoption of further measures in that area. Since racism grew out of ignorance and prejudice, the Baltic

(Ms. Damusis, Lithuania)

States firmly believed that the best antidote was education and they would continue their efforts to eliminate the cumulative resentment of their nationals over past oppression and to institute guarantees for the protection of minority rights. He hoped that neighbouring States would join them in that process by promoting reconciliation and awareness among their own citizens. Joint measures must be taken to address persisting hostile and imperial attitudes in a manner which would be instructive to all sides.

37. Mr. LEMINE (Mauritania) regretted that the Second Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination was drawing to a close and that the scourge of racism not only had not been eliminated but was even re-emerging in certain parts of the world. The proposed third decade, must include a thorough study of the obstacles encountered during the first two decades and an analysis of the causes of the re-emergence of racial antagonism, xenophobia and intolerance, which, besides being an affront to humanity, were a source of instability throughout the world. To that end it was necessary to join forces and the elements of a programme of action for a third decade proposed by the Secretary-General in his report (A/47/432) would undoubtedly make a significant contribution to that undertaking.

38. The accession of numerous States to the international instruments on racism and racial discrimination was indicative of the growing awareness of the problems. The lack of international solidarity, the deteriorating economic and social situation in many countries, and the political changes in other countries were, however, responsible for the re-emergence of the afore-mentioned phenomena.

39. With regard to the situation in South Africa, despite the significant progress which had already been achieved, continued pressure should be exerted on the Government of that country to end the violence and to accelerate the transition process. The assistance of the international community would continue to be necessary after apartheid had disappeared, in order to mitigate the countless consequences of that abhorrent system.

40. The adoption of the proposed amendment to article 8, paragraph 6, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination would enable the Committee established pursuant to that Convention to exercise its functions in the proper manner. Similarly, the adoption of the declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities was of paramount importance at a time when the issue of minorities was becoming increasingly urgent.

41. Mr. KABIR (Bangladesh) said that, while the recent changes in political relations might have shaken the foundations of institutionalized racism or apartheid, they were not sufficient for the international community to allow itself to become complacent. Notwithstanding the reforms instituted in South Africa, there was evidence of a design to perpetuate apartheid through a strategy of "divide and rule" and the patronage of the so-called homelands.

(Mr. Kabir, Bangladesh)

The international community must continue to support peace efforts, but the primary responsibility lay with the South African regime. His delegation appealed to all the parties in South Africa to work together to ensure that the idea of a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa became a reality.

42. At the same time, the xenophobia directed by ultra-nationalist groups against the immigrant population and refugees in certain European countries and the mindless persecution of innocent persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Serbian nationalist forces on the pretext of so-called "ethnic cleansing" demonstrated that a new and dangerous trend of racism was taking root. Unless it was firmly checked, the virus of "ethnic cleansing" could cruelly tear apart the social fabric anywhere in the world.

43. Racial violence was often the result of social neglect and privation. The problems of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment were the root causes of social discontent and urgent measures should therefore be taken to address them.

44. He stressed that universal adherence to the international instruments on racial discrimination and apartheid was of the utmost importance. Reiterating Bangladesh's commitment to the objectives established in those instruments and in the Programme of Action for the Second Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, he said that his country welcomed the proposal for the launching of a third decade in 1993, and suggested that the corresponding programme of action should give due priority to the new trends of racism and to educational programmes to combat racism and racial discrimination.

45. Turning to the issue of self-determination, his delegation was particularly concerned over the problem of Palestine. It was encouraging that Israel had accepted Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) as the basis of peace negotiations, as well as the principle of "land for peace". Israel should demonstrate the sincerity of that acceptance by unconditionally withdrawing from all Arab territories occupied in 1967. His delegation called upon Israel to demonstrate its genuine desire for peace by allowing the Palestinian people to determine their own future, thus ushering in a new era of cooperation between Palestine and Israel which would not only result in the prosperity and well-being of both sides, but would also contribute to the progress and development of the region and of the world at large.

46. The movement for self-determination drew its inspiration from democratic principles. Democracy and pluralism were flourishing, largely because of the spontaneous support of the international community for the cause of democracy. That support should, however, be accompanied by adequate participatory development assistance to improve socio-economic conditions and to build democratic institutions in the developing world. The peace dividends, which should not remain mere rhetoric, were capable of transforming the current situation of the poorer nations in the direction of prosperity.

(Mr. Kabir, Bangladesh)

His delegation urged that the future should not be placed in jeopardy for the sake of immediate gratification, but that people should work in concert to make democracy the birthright of all peoples, for them all to practice and to enjoy.

47. Mr. TURK (Slovenia) said that, if the objectives of the principle of equality and non-discrimination were to be attained, effective implementation machinery was vital. It must be borne in mind that the judiciary and administrative organs within States might not always be enough, in which case international mechanisms would be necessary.

48. Slovenia had notified its accession to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, in order to leave no doubt that the relevant legal regime had been enforced at all stages. Continuity of that legal regime was guaranteed in Slovenia, and the Government would duly report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the situation in Slovenia and on its efforts to attain full realization of the principle of equality and non-discrimination.

49. His delegation welcomed the proposal to finance the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination from the United Nations regular budget, and hoped that the General Assembly would take appropriate measures to that effect during the current session.

50. With regard to the system of apartheid and the current situation in South Africa, experience showed that apartheid must be abolished; for it could not be reformed.

51. The so-called "ethnic cleansing" pursued in Bosnia and Herzegovina had become one of the most brutal practices of the century, and had taken on genocidal proportions; much more vigorous action was needed to halt it than had so far been taken. The Security Council would have to play a leading role in that regard.

52. There was no doubt that the Second Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination had been a necessary exercise, and that important efforts had been made to eradicate those practices. However, they still persisted, and further action would be needed. Slovenia supported the idea of launching a third decade, and believed that the World Conference on Human Rights should make a serious contribution to the elimination of such practices.

53. With regard to the question of self-determination, his delegation believed that the time was ripe for reflection. The fact of the matter was that a number of peoples had recently realized their right to self-determination and had become independent States. That was a fact of which note must be taken, and which must be accepted as a new norm, even though it might lend itself to different interpretations.

(Mr. Turk, Slovenia)

54. Under the terms of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the international community had recognized the right of all peoples to determine freely their political status and to pursue freely their economic, social and cultural development. It was no coincidence that neither covenant provided a specific definition of the concept of a people; nor did they define the exact political status to which a given people might be entitled - questions that could be answered only in concreto, in the light of all relevant circumstances, which must be assessed realistically and without prejudice.

55. In recent months and years the world community had witnessed the disintegration of some multinational States, a fact which demonstrated that such States must continuously justify their raison d'être. Once they began to rely on obsolete ideologies or even on brute force, rather than on the free consent of the peoples that constituted them, their existence was necessarily called into question. Free consent and fair political balance were necessary for such States to develop and continue to exist.

56. Another lesson learned from that process was that change, which was perhaps the only constant in human history, might sometimes take on unforeseen proportions. The point was not to prevent or stop the process of change once it started, but to ensure that it took place peacefully. What his delegation proposed was simply that the need for change and the concept of peaceful change should be accepted; and if change was to be peaceful, human rights criteria and the principle of equality and non-discrimination for all human beings were central.

57. Mr. AINSO (Estonia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that during the Soviet occupation there had been mass displacements of population in contravention of the recognized norms of international law laid down in article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. During that period, some 8 million persons had come to Estonia, where they had worked for a time before returning. When Estonia had regained independence, some 600,000 such persons still remained.

58. When independence had been restored, the 1938 law on citizenship, whereby a person might obtain Estonian citizenship in three years, had also been restored; consequently, from March 1993 any person residing in Estonia would be able to apply for Estonian citizenship if he or she so desired.

59. Under the terms of articles 3 and 4 of the Treaty between Estonia and the Russian Federation, any person residing in Estonia or in the Russian Federation could apply for citizenship of one or the other country, subject to the legislation of the country of residence.

60. Estonia welcomed with interest the offer to negotiate all questions, including the question of enabling the Estonian population that had been deported to Siberia to return.

61. Ms. KALNILTE (Latvia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, while welcoming the view expressed by the representative of the Russian Federation that there were no problems which could not be resolved through open and frank negotiations, pointed to the existence of treaties on relations between Latvia and the Russian Federation that had been ratified by the respective Parliaments. She also drew attention to the earlier statement by the representative of Lithuania, made on behalf of the three Baltic States.

62. Mr. PARSHIKOV (Russian Federation), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the statements by the representatives of Estonia and Latvia showed that there were different ways of interpreting the facts, and that the two States' positions were diametrically opposed; but that the facts were plain to see. His delegation thus noted with satisfaction the good will shown by Latvia and Estonia in the General Assembly in accepting the fact-finding mission in accordance with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.